

Columnists

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In The
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Responding to uneasy writers

By Father Paul J. Cuddy
A recent rash of letters have come, expressing dissatisfaction with the clergy and trends in the Church. They come usually from misunderstanding. Consider these.

From an uneasy writer:
1) "I am no fan of the *Catholic Digest*, and I am surprised to find you polluting the minds and morals of your dear relatives with this periodical."

Comment: In Rob Cullivan's recent interview with me (*Courier-Journal*, Dec. 24), he wrote: "Father Cuddy zealously espouses Catholic literature. He recently wrote he sends 40 subscriptions to the *Catholic Digest* to various nieces and nephews."

U.W. 2: "I hope you read the *Catholic Digest* more critically in the future, and come to see it does not represent the right side of Catholicism. It is a pity that more deserving Catholic publications don't get the press they deserve. I am referring to publications like *30 Days* and others."

Comment: On January 6, I wrote to 130 priests and religious: "I am enthusiastic about the latest Catholic monthly, *30 Days*, published by Ignatius Press. It combines the pictorial attractiveness of *Life*, the perceptiveness of scholarly writers, and a breadth of the international Catholic scene, embracing politics, theology and influential personages." Father William J. Gaynor of Elmira Heights commented: "It is good, but it is heavy reading." Some of our religious still have a bent for upper middle-brow presentations.

The address is: *30 Days*, Subscription Department, P.O. Box 6718, Syracuse, NY, 13217.

However, what I want for my young kin are articles that are family-oriented.

U.W. 3: "Then there is the matter of your truculent defense of scandals in the Church. You seem to dismiss them out of hand, as if they lack importance."

Comment: Come off it! I have never, never defended scandals in the Church. But the late Father Guy, an astute, scholarly priest, when faced with unsolvable events, used to sigh: "All we can do is deplore." If I ran off with Mother Superior, what would you suggest?

From another U.W.: "Our pastor had a penance service at which there were 25 present. He gave general absolution, and afterward made himself available for private confession. Question: Was the absolution valid?"

Comment: If the individuals were in proper

On the Right side

disposition, yes. However, I think if I were so upset by such a service, I would go to some other parish where my soul would be tranquil.

From another U.W.: "Every month our pastor administers the Sacrament of Anointing. If those in church do not come forward, he makes an issue of it. Is it valid?"

Comment: When I was assisting Father James Cosgrove in Waterloo, he had the anointing of the sick at a recent Sunday Mass. He announced: "This sacrament is only for the sick, or for people 55 years old or older. Please do not bring your children up for this sacrament." This was good theology and good pastoral direction.

Another U.W.: "Our priest tells us not to call him 'Father,' because the Scripture says 'Call no man 'Father'' excepting our Father in heaven.' He wants us to call him by some buddy-buddy name."

Comment: I suppose the hospitality toward titles of courtesy is rooted in a passion for drab sameness. So these titles to the president, the bishop, the priest, the doctor, the justice, the religious sister — civilized titles of courtesy — are to be repelled. Over 50 years ago, a young Witness of Jehovah loomed at the door of our family home in Auburn. Beholding the Roman collar, she ejected: "Call no man 'father.'" I was furious because the Witnesses were spreading scurrilous pamphlets against the Catholic Church and the pope. When her companion, a nice woman about 20, joined her, I barked: "Your friend says we should not call our fathers 'father!' What do you call your father?" With admirable poise, she said: "Sometimes 'Daddy,' sometimes 'Pappa,' sometimes 'Father.' Jean is new at this and I will explain it to her."

Protestant fundamentalism. Why not buy him a copy of "Catholicism and Fundamentalism: The attack on 'Romanism' by Bible Christians"??? The author is Karl Keating, and it is published by Ignatius Press. Reviewer Francis Maier writes: "Keating methodically debunks every fundamentalist objection to the Catholic Church. In the process, he shows fundamentalism for what it is. Christianity with little compassion and less wit." I wonder where your priest is getting his low-brow Scripture ideas.

Words and their power for change

By Father Albert Shamon
Sunday's readings: (R3) Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21; (R1) Nehemiah 8:2-6, 8-10; (R2) 1 Corinthians 12:12-30.

The word "Watergate" conjures up all kinds of nasty connotations for us. We think of a nation almost torn apart by it. We remember laws broken and powerful people trying to cover up.

In Sunday's first reading, we are told that the scribe Ezra stood "before the Water Gate" and read to the people from dawn till noon. Here we see a nation being reborn, the Law upheld and powerful figures involved in revealing the truth.

About 536 B.C., the remnant of the tribe of Judah returned to a burnt-out Jerusalem. In 515 B.C., the temple was rebuilt. Nehemiah came along about 445 B.C., — the period of Obadiah and Malachi. The Jewish community was struggling at the time. External enemies threatened it; poverty, discontent and religious apathy within weakened it. Nehemiah's arrival as governor was a turning point. He rebuilt the walls of the city and started religious reforms. Ezra came afterward, about 398 B.C., and brought the law and the religious authority necessary to restructure the community of faith.

The Jewish religion needed to be redefined. Ezra did this. He established the law, the Torah, as sacred writing, inspired by God. Ezra proposed it as the rule of life for the Jewish community and thus became the father of Judaism.

The occasion was the Feast of Tabernacles. Men, women and children old enough to understand were gathered for the feast. Ezra stood on a platform so all the people could see him. When he opened the book of the law to read, the people stood up in respect for God as the author of the words they were about to hear. From dawn till dusk the people listened attentively, Ezra read in Hebrew, but at that time the people had trouble with Hebrew. In Babylon, they had begun to learn Aramaic. So the Levites translated the Hebrew into Aramaic, and in addition interpreted the meaning of the law. This interpretation became known as a Targum.

A Word for Sunday

When the people heard the law, they wept. They wept as they sensed their ingratitude to a God who had been with them throughout their history. But tears of repentance brought joy, and joy led to celebration. The animals slain before the reading of the law were eaten at a sacrificial meal as in the days of old before the exile.

God's words are always meant to lead one to repentance, then to joy, and joy in the Lord is to be the strength of His people.

Human words — how powerful they are! Leo Rosten, in his little essay "The Power of Words," gives them this tribute: "They sing. They hurt. They teach. They sanctify. They were man's first immeasurable feat of magic. They liberated us from ignorance and our barbarous past ...

"A picture is worth 10,000 words," goes the timeworn Chinese maxim. "But," one writer tartly said, "It takes words to say that." ...

"We live by words: Love, Truth, God. We fight for words: Freedom, Country, Fame. We die for words: Liberty, Glory, Honor. ...

"And the men who truly shape our destiny, the giants who teach us, inspire us, lead us to deeds of immortality, are those who use words with clarity, grandeur and passion. Socrates, Lincoln, Churchill — Jesus!

But in the mouth of God, inspired by Him, words reach their superlative power.

Once Jesus took bread and said, "Change" — and it did.

Once Jesus took wine and said, "Change", — and it did.

Once He gave the bread and wine to his disciples and said, "Change" — form a new community, form a new people, a purified people, a joyful people, a celebrating people, a People of God — and it is!

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